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YEAR OF CONFUSION

IT WAS THE LONGEST ON RECORD AND HAD FIFTEEN MONTHS.

The Way Julius Caesar in the Year 46 B. C. Straightened Out the Calendar Muddle—Early Attempt to Adjust the Lunar Cycles.

The longest year in the world's history was a year that contained fifteen months. The original cause that led up to this was an early attempt to adjust the lunar months which began with each new moon in their relation to the solar year. Twelve revolutions of the moon take 354 days, about eleven days less than a true year. The ancients tried at first to correct this by inserting, generally every other year, a special intercalary month, just as we do an additional day in leap year. In the Roman calendar, from which our own has descended, these corrections were always made at the end of the year. The earliest Roman year began in March, as we see by the numerical Latin names of several of our months—September (seven), October (eight), November (nine), December (ten)—and we still add our intercalary day in leap year just before the ancient New Year's day.

In time the months dropped their lunar character and became of irregular length, varying from thirty-one days in March to twenty-eight in February. The year had 355 days, some ten days less than a true year. Later on the 1st of January became both the New Year and the inauguration day of the Roman consuls. These chief magistrates of the Roman republic, unlike our presidents, were elected annually, so that inauguration day then was more important than it is at Washington, since it was actually the beginning of a new official or civil year each 1st of January. The intercalary month was, however, still inserted between February and March, according to ancient custom. The insertion of intercalary months and all matters pertaining to the calendar rested in ancient Rome with the college of pontiffs, which formed the supreme priestly council, the proper observance of the festivals of the gods and other sacred days coming especially within the domain of religion. But the pontiffs, with their chief, the pontifex maximus, were too often dominated by political considerations. In early times they were chosen exclusively from the patrician families. Their privilege of inserting or omitting the intercalary month gave them great political power, which, politician-like, they used to the advantage of their own party and the injury of the plebeians. On personal grounds they capriciously lengthened the year when their friends held the chief magistracy and shortened it when the opposition held office.

This practice at length involved the calendar in such confusion that in Cicero's day it was three months ahead of true time. Thus the 1st of May fell in bleak wintry weather at what was properly about the 1st of February, while the 1st of January came in the fall season at what is now the beginning of October. The ancient Romans had to endure the irony of dating their letters in November when they were trying to bear up under the blazing heat of an Italian summer.

But in the year B. C. 46 Rome's foremost soldier, Julius Caesar, was able to take the matter in hand. Among the many honors received by this conqueror was the office of pontifex maximus, and as head of the priestly college matters appertaining to the calendar fell within his province. His soldier's system took up the muddle in the calendar, which he straightened out with his accustomed vigor. To imagine a modern parallel we should have to suppose some one like Napoleon on his elevation of the consulship or General Grant fresh from the civil war and his election to the presidency undertaking to correct a confusion in the calendar due to the manipulations of politicians.

Caesar called in the aid of Sosigenes, an Alexandrian astronomer, to rectify the error and prevent it for the future. It was in the year of Rome 708—46 B. C., according to our reckoning—that the revision took place. It is said, although this point is not quite certain, that Caesar intended to fix the 1st of January in the following year 709 (B. C. 45) on the winter solstice, the shortest day in the year. This arrangement would have been as nearly perfect as possible, far superior to that which we observe, in which New Year falls some ten days after the solstice and has no reference to anything of a natural character. If Caesar had taken the shortest day for the 1st of January he would have had a definitely fixed landmark indicated by the movement of the earth itself as pre-eminently the correct point of time for this event, for the sun sinks daily and the days become shorter until Dec. 21 or 22, when, as if new born, the sun begins again to mount the heavens and the days to lengthen. The Roman name for this time was "Natalis solis invicti" (the birthday of the unconquered sun), when that luminary's decline was changed into a fresh ascension.

It is one of the greatest misfortunes of the calendar that this change was not carried out. But the story goes that about ten days later than the solstice there was a new moon, which was the starting point of the ancient lunar months. It was still looked upon as a good augury for a month to begin on the new moon, and as it was desired that the year 709, the opening year of Caesar's new calendar, should be inaugurated under circumstances that would be auspicious and commend the change to public approval

it was determined that the following Jan. 1 should be on the day of the new moon. But as the new moon would come at different dates in other years the good augury for that one year was secured at the loss of a far more important consideration for all future time. So our New Year is close to the shortest day, but not on it, and derives its present arbitrary position, according to this story, from the new moon happening to fall on that day in the year B. C. 45.

But, apart from this, the straightening out of the calendar was admirably managed. The undoing of the tangle was a serious matter and made the year B. C. 46 forever memorable. The 1st of January fell, as we have seen, about three months too soon—that is, in the pleasant autumnal weather shortly after the vintage days, that were properly in the early part of October. The year was allowed to run on until toward the close of February, when the intercalary month was inserted at the usual place. This added twenty-three days to the year, but did not suffice. The calendar was still two months out, and the 1st of March was giving Rome the weather of Christmas. So at the end of November (which came at what is now the end of September) two more months were inserted, containing between them sixty-seven days. By the insertion of these special months, which have never since appeared in the calendar, the month of December was brought to the season in which it now falls, the two intercalary months covering our October and November. These two months were in a sense duplicated. Thus in this year there had been added to the regular 355 days ninety more. This made the unprecedented total of 445 days, or fifteen months. The year extended, according to our present reckoning, from the beginning of October to twelve months following the next Dec. 31. This started the year of Rome 709 (B. C. 45) at the time at which our years now commence.

This remarkable year was scoffingly called "the year of confusion," but Macrobius correctly says that it should rather be called "the last year of confusion." The strong measures that had to be taken were necessary if order was to be restored and the months once again placed in their old time honored seasons.

But all Caesar's changes were not yet carried out. The year had still 355 days, and this was ten and a quarter days too short. It was determined to avoid in future the insertion of an intercalary month. The old experience with this arrangement had been sufficiently unfortunate. So the year was raised to its present length of 365 days and thus made a solar year by adding two days each to January, Sextilis and December and one day each to April, June, September and November, the quarter day over being adjusted by the insertion of an extra day every four years at the end of February. Our insertion of this day at the ancient termination of the year is now our only reminder of the one time insertion there of a whole month.

In this way was the great soldier's work carried out and the system of chronology established that we practically use today. It was an appropriate tribute when Augustus changed the name of the month when Caesar was born so that we have a reminder of this in the name of Julius (July) in place of its ancient designation Quintilis.

But, after all, the year of Julius Caesar was not correct enough, for the real year is eleven minutes twelve seconds short of the 365 days and 6 hours of his arrangement. This is very slight, making only about three-quarters of a day in a century. But in the sixteenth century the year was ten days behind true time, and corrections were again made in the calendar. It was still a Pontifex Maximus who did this, for the bishops of Rome assumed that title after the fall of the empire. In 1582 Pope Gregory XIII. made the necessary corrections by ordering that the day after the 4th of October should be called the 15th, and to guard against the error in the future it was ordered that the year completing each century should not be a leap year except at every fourth century.—Walter J. Kidd in New York Post.

A Task in Subtraction.

At a small school in the backwoods a well meaning but misguided instructor gave her pupils as a home lesson the task of subtracting 629 from 880,788,889 until nothing remained. On the way from school the children rejoiced at so easy a requisition, but once at work their rejoicing was speedily turned to sorrow. After working for hours without any perceptible diminution of the figures the youngsters gave up in despair. Parents then tried, but with no better success. And small wonder. In order to complete the task the number given would have to be subtracted 1,400,300 times, leaving a small remainder. Some indignant parent calculated that, working at the rate of three subtractions a minute for twelve hours a day, the task given the children for an evening's exercise would require a little more than a year and nine months to accomplish.

An Overdose.

"Is it true," asked Mr. Quiso, "that your husband ordered Dr. Smoother out of the house?"
"Yes. Poor Jack had been carrying the baby all night and every night for a week and was run down to a thread. I called the doctor, and he told Jack that he must take exercise."

The Father's Idea.

Johnny—Paw, what's the rest of that quotation beginning, "Truth is mighty?"
Father—"Scarse." I reckon.—Pittsburg Post.

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